

Madison River Recreation Public Comment Themes

The following were identified as the major themes or key principles brought forward in public comment that were influential in determining recommendations.

Commercial Cap and Allocation

A common theme in the public comments was that the proposed commercial cap and allocation system would favor larger and/or well-established outfitters. Some commenters felt that the need for a cap was baseless. Others acknowledged a need but took issue primarily with how the allocation would be designed. Some outfitters criticized all aspects of the allocation methodology but not the monetization related to transferred days. Non-outfitters were more likely to question the monetization and the authority of the work group, while supporting the mandatory trip reductions. Some commenters resistant to a workgroup or caps seemed to be suspicious of bureaucratic overreach and self-interest.

Noncommercial use on the Madison River

Non-commercial use on the river was another common theme in the public comments. Many comments illustrated concerns that the non-commercial use is increasing at a fast rate, causing crowding and resource impacts yet going unaddressed. Commenters also raised concerns that the commercial industry was being unfairly regulated with no regulations being put in place on non-commercial users. Some suggested that commercial and non-commercial users should be regulated at the same time. The concept of the proposed stamp was identified to gather information related to non-commercial use although concerns were raised about the enforcement of a stamp and compliance rates. The concern that FWP is not proposing to regulate non-commercial use immediately (but rather kick the can down the road with more studies) was also used by many as a reason to oppose walk/wade and rest/rotation measures, arguing that they would be ineffective or unfair to outfitters.

Walk/Wade

The concept of having sections of the river set aside for wade fishing only was commented on frequently. The main issues raised were impacts of boats on wade anglers being exaggerated or insignificant; boat restrictions favoring landowners; and that any boat restriction is equivalent to “privatizing” stretches of the river. One consistently expressed perception is that landowners are directing the rulemaking effort behind the scenes. Lastly, many claim the ban on boats is a violation of or at least an affront to the Stream Access Law. This argument is made through many of the “form letter” comments. Those who favored walk/wade restrictions were frequently happy with the existing rules, but usually cited the disruptive nature of boats or how they unfairly gained access to remote areas. Typically, the anti-boat sentiment was not directed at outfitters.

Rest/rotation

Rest/rotation river sections, where a section of river on a certain day of the week would be set aside for non-commercial use only, was a very common topic in the public comments. Concerns were raised that any form of rest/rotation on the Madison River would lead to more crowding because of the limited length of the river and the restrictions rest/rotation would place on availability of float sections. Reference was often made to the rest/rotation system on the Big Hole and how that works because there is more stream length than on the Madison. Others expressed a desire for rest/rotation to provide non-commercial users with sections on certain days of the week when they can fish without having interactions with guided trips.

Work Group Authority

The proposed rule established a work group that would have overseen the allocation of commercial trips. Many comments expressed concern that this gave the work group too much authority or took away authority from the commission. Other comments suggested that a work group could be used to evaluate other portions of the proposed rule or even help establish caps for non-commercial use.

Madison River Stamp

Most people supported the concept or intent of a stamp but did not delve into specifics. A few were opposed or offended by the idea that they might need a stamp (permit) or even pay to use the river. Although it was originally proposed as a way of collecting information, some have endorsed it as a punitive tool against boaters or non-residents. Some people questioned its enforceability and some who saw it as a data collection tool were uncertain what was ultimately intended. On a related issue, some asked for a carrying capacity study, which presumably would include the same type of data collection as was envisioned for the stamp.